

Gile - 33 - senate

AFT-Maryland Candidate Questionnaire for the 2022 Election

AFT-Maryland is a federation of local unions of the AFT within the state, including the Baltimore Teachers Union and the City Union of Baltimore, as well as state employee members of the Maryland Professional Employees Council, AFT Healthcare-Maryland, and the Maryland Classified Employees Association. Together, with the Baltimore County Federation of Public Employees, and Baltimore County Federation of Public Health Nurses, AFT-Maryland has thousands of members who work to make the state a better place for its residents.

The AFT-Maryland has prepared the following questionnaire for candidates running to represent us in Annapolis as a means to familiarize the candidates with issues that our members care about most. It also allows us the chance to see where the candidates stand on these issues.

AFT-Maryland locals participate fully in the endorsement process of the Maryland and DC AFL-CIO State Federation; the state federation will announce its final endorsements in early 2022. However, because we are a large contingency within the Maryland AFL-CIO, the unions of the AFT-Maryland have a heavy influence on who labor chooses as its candidates for endorsement.

Please take the time to complete this candidate questionnaire by no later than January 7th, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.

If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at 410-764-3030 or treynolds@aftmd.org.



Candidate Information

Please note the AFT-Maryland plans to make these questionnaires public. However, personal information will be redacted.

Employer

MacDonald Law Group, LLC

Party affiliation

Democratic

Have you ever been endorsed by a labor union? If so, which one(s) and when?

Yes. Local 602 - Steamfitters (1/6/22). Have also received the support of the Anne Arundel County Professional Firefighters (12/24/21).

Have you ever held elected office? If so, when?

No

General Questions

1. The AFT-Maryland is a federation of numerous employee unions, including Baltimore City teachers and paraprofessional and school-related personnel (BTU); professional state workers (MPEC—Maryland Professional Employees Council), state healthcare professionals (AFT Healthcare-Maryland), state classified employees (MCEA—Maryland Classified Employees Association); as well county (BCFPE and BCFPHN) and city (CUB) employees. Why should we support your campaign?

As District 33's next state senator, I would be an advocate for supporting working families with policies such as increased worker protections and safety, support for collective bargaining and healthcare access, increased availability of affordable, quality childcare, and staunch support for paid family leave, as well as other benefits that I appreciate AFT-Maryland and other labor allies would be stalwarts. I also wholly support investing in our public schools with the necessary resources our educators and administrators need to ensure our students thrive, including fairly compensating our teachers, paraprofessional, and other school personnel with professional salaries they deserve.

2. Have you ever been a member of a labor union? If yes, please give the name and date.

No.

Questions on Worker Rights

3. Expanding the right to collective bargaining. Currently, a number of state and public school employees in Maryland have collective bargaining. However, many still do not. For example, state judiciary branch workers; grad students, adjuncts, and full-time faculty in the University of Maryland System; faculty at our state's community colleges; coordinators in community schools; and many county and city librarians; do not have the right to bargain collectively. If elected, will you sponsor and/or support legislation to grant these public employees the right to engage in collective bargaining with their employer?

Yes, I would commit to supporting legislation extending collective bargaining rights for these employees.

4. Raising the minimum wage. Our members see every day the harmful impact of a minimum wage that does not keep up with rising costs of living throughout the region. While Maryland will raise its minimum wage to \$15 per hour in 2025, it still will not be indexed to inflation, and Marylanders working at this compensation level will continue to fall behind. If elected to office, will you author and/or support legislation to tie the minimum wage to the rate of inflation?

Yes, I would indeed author and/or support legislation to tie the minimum wage to the rate of inflation. Workers continue to fall behind when minimum wage does not match the increased cost of food, housing, and other necessities.

5. Binding arbitration in contract negotiations.

Maryland recognizes the importance of collective bargaining as a way to assure employees at the state, municipal, and school district level have a fair and democratic voice in the conditions that govern their employment. For many of those employees and their unions, when disagreements arise during negotiations, there is no mechanism by which those disputes can be resolved. In most cases when the parties reach an impasse, management can implement their proposals without the consent of the employees. Because of this, management often realizes there is no need to bargain in good faith. To fix this flaw, many states and local governments have implemented binding arbitration. When an impasse arises at the bargaining table, management and the union agree to take their case to an objective, third party arbitrator. The arbitrator hears the case, and issues a ruling that both management and the employees must agree to. There is some form of binding arbitration for state employees in Connecticut, Delaware, and Maine, and Baltimore County offers binding arbitration for its municipal employees, for example.

Do you support objective, binding arbitration for contract negotiations for school district, city, county, and state employees? As an elected official, would you support strengthening those rights for the public employees that fall under your jurisdiction?

Yes, I support fair and objective binding arbitration for contract negotiations for school district, city, county, and state employees. Yes, I would support strengthening those rights for public employees.

6. Public employee compensation. Under the current governor's administration, it is rare for state workers to get the compensation they deserve, even though the state has often had a budget surplus. As a result, too many public agencies have staffing problems, as many employees leave for better compensation in the private sector. What is your plan to assure state, county, and municipal employees (including workers employed at BCCC, the Maryland School for the Deaf, and all public, state-supported higher education institutions throughout the state) that their compensation levels will be financially competitive with the private sector?

First, I think we need to ensure that we are supporting public employees' right to bargain collectively because collective bargaining is critical to providing fair compensation and benefits. I would also support increasing public employee pay and benefits to ensure we are not losing valuable public employees to the private sector. I think such compensation levels need to be specifically outlined by legislation and that state agencies need to be held accountable for failure to pay state workers the compensation they deserve.

7. Health insurance transparency. Audits and budget analysis show some government healthcare surplus funds are being diverted for use in unrelated areas. In effect, employees are therefore paying much higher than their negotiated healthcare splits for employer self-insured healthcare coverage. What should a public body (the state, the municipality, or the local school system) do with money refunded to employees' health insurance programs? As an elected official, will you sponsor legislation that would force government employers with self-funded insurance programs to be more transparent with actual claim cost, rebates and other refund programs?

I support transparency on government health insurance, and I would support refunding the money back to those who paid it: the employees. I would indeed support legislation that requires greater transparency as those who pay into the service deserve to know the breakdown of costs.

8. Retirement for public employees: defined benefit versus defined contribution. Most Maryland public employees have defined benefit retirement plans like a pension. This allows employees to plan for their retirement because they know exactly how much income they will be receiving. With defined contribution retirement plans like a 401(k), employees contemplating retirement are never quite sure when the right time is to retire because of changes in their plan's investments. Do you support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans?

Yes, I support keeping public employee retirement plans as defined benefit/pension plans. Public employees should have the security of knowing what income they will receive at retirement and to be able to plan accordingly.

9. Prescription drugs for retired state employees. The State of Maryland is currently being sued by a group of retired state employees over the loss of their prescription drug coverage. Their position is the state has backed out of the promised retiree prescription drug benefit. Do you support full health benefits for retirees including prescription drug benefits? Under what circumstances, if any, would you agree to a reduction in benefits for retirees?

Yes, I support full health benefits for retirees including prescription drug benefits, and I do not support a reduction in benefits for retirees. The state must adhere to the promise it made to these employees, and it is inherently unfair to reduce benefits after retirement. These retirees made the decision to continue working for the state based on an evaluation of benefits and pay. They could have decided to work for the private sector. Consequently, the state should uphold their promise as these benefits are what they worked for.

10. Appropriate staffing levels. This past fall, numerous news reports confirmed what many state employees have already known: that staffing in a number of state agencies have fallen to levels that the safety of workers and the ability to carry out their duties has been compromised. For example, the Maryland Department of Health has not been able to admit court-ordered patients to state mental health facilities in accordance with the law due to the lack of staff. Likewise, the State Investment Park Commission found that park ranger staffing levels are too low to meet the demand of Maryland Residents wanting to visit our state's parks. The most recent state analysis shows nearly every state agency has at least a 10% vacancy rate, with some of the larger agencies having a vacancy rate over 15%! Would you support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county and city employees? Would you make funding of additional staff a priority?

These vacancy rates are egregious, and I would support efforts to increase recruitment and retention of qualified state, county and city employees. I would also make funding and hiring additional staff a top priority. Staffing shortages decrease morale and safety (both citizen and employee safety), and further, they deny Marylanders the services guaranteed to them by the government.

Public Education in Baltimore City

11. General [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]: What do you think are the three biggest problems facing Baltimore City public schools? If elected, how will you solve these problems?

N/A

12. Education funding. The state has enacted the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, an ambitious plan developed by bipartisan education experts and stakeholders. The Blueprint will provide a world-class education our students need. Despite hand-wringing from the current governor, the state has the funding to pay for the Blueprint through Fiscal Year 2026. Beginning in FY 2027, the state will have to make decisions regarding revenues to continue to provide every student in the state the education they need. If elected, how would you propose the state fund the Blueprint? How will you advocate for these necessary revenues?

I would support the following revenue measures: increasing personal income tax on very high earners, increasing corporate taxes, closing corporate tax loopholes, increasing estate and inheritance tax, and taxing recreational marijuana, if legalized.

13. Living Wage for Paraprofessionals. One element that was unfortunately unresolved by the Kirwan Commission recommendations was the pay for Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRPs). For too many PSRPs throughout the state, their compensation levels are not enough to be considered a living wage. Will PSRP compensation be a high priority for you if you are elected to office? How can the state better show its appreciation to PSRPs working in our state's public schools?

Yes, compensation for paraprofessionals and school related personnel would be a high priority for me if elected. We need to recognize the economic dignity of these personnel and ensure that we are providing them good wages and benefits as well. It is imperative that they are paid a competitive, fair salary, sufficient for a good quality of life so that they are able to pay for essential needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and other necessities. PSRPs are critical to the safe operation of our schools, and they are necessary for ensuring that are children are thriving.

14. Public School Construction and Renovation [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2013, the state passed the 21st Century Schools Program, which allowed the Baltimore Public School System and the Maryland Stadium Authority to leverage bonds to renovate roughly 25 public school buildings. While a good start, Baltimore city still has the largest portfolio of aging and obsolete school buildings in the state; therefore, the program needs to be expanded. If elected, what will your administration do to assure more aging school buildings in Baltimore city will be eligible for renovations?

N/A

15. Public charter schools and local oversight. There are over 50 public charter schools in the state of Maryland, and the vast majority of them reside in Baltimore city. Private, out-of-state charter school operators have previously wished to weaken the state law overseeing charter schools to make teachers and staff employees of the charter board rather than employees of the local school district. This would remove all protections that teachers and staff have under their collective bargaining agreements. It would limit oversight of these privately run public charter schools by taking them out from under the purview of the local school boards. It would also give the private operators a “blank check waiver” from any local school board policy. Should charter school teachers and staff be considered employees of the charter school or of the local school board? Should oversight of these schools be weakened?

I think that charter school teachers and staff should be considered employees of the local school board. Privatization of education jobs leads to less experienced staff, decreased morale, more turnover, and decreased control by school boards. I also believe that privatization decreases accountability and service quality and ultimately, harms the local economy as school employees lose good jobs and at times, have to give up benefits. It also undermines collective bargaining efforts. Further, we should ensure any school option that receives public funding should be controlled by local school boards. Consequently, I do not think that oversight of these schools be weakened.

16. School vouchers and the BOOST program. Maryland is a state that diverts public funding to send students to private schools - the BOOST school voucher program. While the program is not codified in law, the governor's budget every year has re-directed millions of dollars of public funds to these private schools, many of which discriminate against students and families who don't adhere to that school's beliefs such as gay marriage. If elected to office, what will be your plan regarding Maryland's BOOST school voucher program? Should the state ever give public dollars to students to attend a private school? Would you support tax breaks to corporations that fund student scholarships for private k-12 schools?

I believe that we need to ensure that public money goes to our public schools, and I would support phasing out the BOOST program. As noted above, we should ensure that public money goes to our public schools, so I would not support giving public dollars to students who attend private schools. I also would not support tax breaks to corporations that fund student scholarships for private k-12 schools.

17. School Staffing. In too many of our public schools, administrators are not following the law and are hiring people who are employees of non-profit organizations, some of whom are uncredentialed and untrained. Because they are not direct hires of the school district, they are not covered by the collective bargaining contract, nor are they held to the same accountability standards as certificated employees. If elected, will you work to ensure that school districts follow the law to prevent public schools from hiring employees from nonprofit organizations, circumventing the collective bargaining agreement? Under any circumstances is it acceptable to you for a school to hire an uncredentialed and non-unionized employee to be involved in the education of Maryland students?

Yes, I would work to ensure that school districts follow the law to prevent public schools from hiring employees from nonprofit organizations. Such actions undermine collective bargaining agreements and risk the safety and well-being of students. I cannot fathom circumstances when it would be acceptable to hire uncredentialed and non-unionized employees to be involved in the education of Maryland students. Employee standards and credentials are in place for reasons, such as ensuring that our students are thriving in safe environments, and by hiring uncredentialed employees, our students are not getting the high quality education they deserve.

18. Teacher recruitment and retention. The global pandemic has exacerbated the increasingly challenging problem of teacher retention and recruitment. Far too often, experienced, successful educators are made to leave our school systems. Newly hired teachers in some alternative teacher education programs stay in the classroom for an average of 3 years. How can the state enact legislation to support the retention of the highest quality educators, and recruit more to their ranks?

We need to start with phasing in increased educator salary sooner. We cannot expect to recruit and retain quality educators if we are not fairly compensating them nor providing adequate benefits. To retain quality educators, we must also ensure that their voices are heard and that they are given a seat at the table when it comes to developing policies for our schools. We also need to look at ways to provide educators greater autonomy in their classrooms and in curriculum development, including by decreasing reliance on testing. I also think that when evaluating improving educator retention, we should look at methods of better supporting educators of color to ensure we are creating a culture of inclusion and belonging in the school environment. In addition, I think the General Assembly can work to expand student loan forgiveness and loan assistance programs to attract and retain educators. I would also examine ways to invest in mentoring programs that would reduce burnout for new teachers and that would support their professional development and competence in the classroom. Adequate administrative support and opportunities for advancement are also imperative in retaining quality educators.

19. Elected versus an appointed school board [for candidates running for Governor, Comptroller, or for office in Baltimore City legislative districts only]. In 2022, the citizens of Baltimore city will finally be allowed to elect two additional members to the school board. Baltimore city is currently the only jurisdiction in the state whose entire School Board of Commissioners is appointed. In 2022 the board will expand from 10 to 12 seats, with the two additional seats being elected rather than appointed. Of the 23 other Maryland county school boards, 19 are fully elected, and four are an appointed/elected hybrid, with only Wicomico County having more appointed than elected positions. If elected, would you support legislation transitioning Baltimore city to a fully elected or hybrid board with the majority of seats being elected? What is the optimal structure for Baltimore City's School Board and why?

N/A

20. Standardized testing in the schools. In our state's public school system, instruction time in our classrooms is often pushed aside so that students may prepare for and take a plethora of standardized tests. What is your view on standardized testing in our state's public schools? If elected, what policy positions would you take regarding the number of standardized tests required of our students?

I think we should limit over-reliance on standardized testing and allow our educators greater flexibility in teaching students. I do think we need to ensure that students are meeting certain benchmarks, but these assessments should be high quality and innovative. I think performance-based assessments provide better insight into how well students have learned and how best to provide extra assistance and modification to lesson plans, where needed. I would support a more holistic and balanced approach that looks at many different factors and indicators. I oppose any labeling or ranking system for schools based on student standardized testing outcomes.

Vision for Maryland

21. Transportation. When Governor Hogan cancelled the Red Line rail project, he replaced it with a revision of the MTA regional bus lines and renamed the system the Baltimore Link. How effective do you believe this new bus plan has been? How can the state improve the transportation needs of its residents?

I believe that the new bus plan is still deficient and unreliable. So much should be done to improve transportation needs for Marylanders. I think that additional funds need to be invested in public transportation to make it a reliable, clean, convenient, and safe means of transport. An unreliable system means that many riders simply cannot not rely on public transit to get them to work on time. I also think that MTA and Metro funding should be prioritized over road and highway expansion. To address climate pollution, we need to do better to increase reliance on public transit for commuting. As someone who must drive a long commute regularly for work, I am personally very frustrated with the traffic congestion in Maryland. Our state is one of the most densely populated states, and we are far too reliant on cars for daily commuting, leading to severely congested highways, many frustrated drivers, and ongoing climate and air pollution. If public transit were safe, reliable, and clean, more people would consider public transit over sitting in clogged highways.

When I lived in Baltimore and worked in DC, I rode the MARC train to work; however, I was frequently frustrated by train delays (even occasions when the train would be stopped for up to an hour!). Additionally, when I lived in Baltimore, I found that many people would not even bother with public transportation because it lacked cleanliness and reliability.

22. Revenues and closing unfair tax loopholes. In order for the state, county, city, and local school system to continue to provide the services to Maryland residents that they deserve, do you believe the state must work to close loopholes in our tax structure? From things like instituting combined reporting (where out-of-state corporations no longer avoid paying taxes on the revenues they generate in Maryland) or a carried interest tax (where wealthy hedge fund managers pay the same income rate that the rest of Maryland residents pay), would you introduce and/or support legislation that would make our state tax code more fair?

Yes, I believe the state must work to close loopholes in our tax structure. Yes, I would introduce and/or support legislation that would make our state tax code more fair, including increasing personal income tax on very high earners and corporations and taxing income earned from wealth similarly as income earned from work.

23. Privatization, General. As public employees, each of our members works for an entity that is directly accountable to the residents we serve. Far too often, when jurisdictions and school districts choose to contract out or privatize those services, the level of accountability changes with those services. A private company or nonprofit is accountable to its board of directors or shareholders, and not necessarily to the residents that rely on its services. In addition, their employees are seldom unionized. If elected, would you support any plans to privatize and/or farm out work to a private company or nonprofit in our state and local governments or local school systems? If so, why?

No, I would not support any plans to privatize and/or farm out work to a private company or nonprofit in our state and local governments or local school systems. As indicated above, privatization undermines collective bargaining and leads to less experienced staff, decreased morale, and decreased quality of services.

24. Privatization, specific. On September 2, 2021, the Maryland Department of Health announced the Facilities Master Plan, which includes plans to close Western Maryland Hospital Center in Hagerstown and Deer's Head Hospital in Salisbury within the next 5 years by transferring patients to private facilities. In many cases, these facilities offer the only long-term care options for Maryland residents on dialysis or who are dealing with chronic respiratory problems. If elected, would you support the plan to close these state facilities? Would you support outsourcing state, county or city operations?

No, I do not support the plan to close these state facilities. I believe that the quality of care for patients would decrease, and further, the outcome would lead to less competitive wages for workers. I do not support outsourcing state, county or city operations for reasons indicated above regarding the negative effects of privatization.

25. State's mental health and addiction crisis. The need for mental health and addiction services has increased during the pandemic. Mental health beds in the state hospital system are filled with court ordered patients. If elected, would you support increasing private and public resources for treatment to be sure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need?

Yes, absolutely. I would support increasing funding for mental health and addiction treatment to be sure all Maryland residents have access to the care they need. Prior to attending law school, I worked at a hospital psychiatric unit and saw first hand how detrimental it is to residents when mental health facilities close. Families and individuals in crisis, who desperately need compassionate care, do not get the services they need and thus, the outcome often leads to increased police interaction.

26. Vaccines and working with unions to return to work. The COVID-19 pandemic has of course been a challenge for the safety of Maryland residents and our members who have been returning to work. While we hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, we know from past experiences with mutations of this novel virus, recovery and a return to normalcy may not be linear. Vaccines must be a part of a comprehensive strategy to get past the pandemic, as well as an important tool for fighting public health threats in the future. What role do you believe unions and management have in constructing a plan to vaccinate their workforce? What in your mind is the way unions and management can work together to make sure represented employees are offered a COVID-19 vaccine?

I believe unions and management need to work collaboratively to develop a plan to vaccinate the workforce and to ensure worker health and safety. I support incentives to employees and a coordinated approach to offering the COVID-19 vaccine, along with evidence-based information provided to employees as to the importance of protecting themselves and their families from COVID-19.

Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to complete this candidate questionnaire. If you have any questions, please contact Todd Reynolds, AFT-Maryland Political Coordinator, at (410) 764-3030, or treynolds@aftmd.org.



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